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March 21st, 2012

Deirdre Williams
Toronto Police Service Board

Attn: Toronto Police Services Board

Re: Endorsing Toronto Police Accountability Coalition's Deputation on 'Collection of Demographic Statistics', March 22nd, 2012, TPSB Meeting

I am the street youth legal services lawyer at Justice for Children and Youth. This letter endorses TPAC's deputation on the 'collection of demographic statistics' at your March 22nd, 2012 TPSB meeting.

For over ten years, the Street Youth Legal Services Program (SYLS) at Justice for Children and Youth has voiced concern over the harm that youth in Toronto have experienced at the hands of our police.

The Toronto Police Service contact cards statistics inform us of a deeply rooted problem of discriminatory police stops and data collection. Youth identifying as minorities experience a higher level of distrust of police, and when considering the real and statistical analysis of their interactions with law enforcement officers, it is not surprising.

Take the example of Tyrell, a 17 year old black youth living in the Jane-Finch neighbourhood. He knew a few officers, and was interested to go into law enforcement. One day, at the food court of his local mall, he was violently arrested, searched and questioned about the people he knew. He was then released without charge. This was done in public, and he was left extremely embarrassed and shameful. Now, instead of wanting to enter law enforcement, he tells me, looking down and in a sad voice, 'I hate them all'.

The weight of surveillance of our youth is crushing. It's hard to hear the pain, anger, and sounds of hopelessness in the voices of youth that are being stopped daily, sometimes questioned, sometimes searched, sometimes physically hurt. It's hard to hear because they are too fearful and too devastated, to speak out. Youth are also intuitively knowing that remedies are not available for their sufferings, as the OIPRD annual report highlights dismal accounts of successful resolution to complaints posed by civilians.

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While Chief Blair asserts that Toronto Police Service methods balance rights and provide youth with a safer community, research studies and our clients tell a different story.

The 2010 publication, 'Surviving Crime and Violence: Street Youth and Victimization in Toronto', by authors Bill O'Grady, Stephen Gaetz and Kristy Buccieri, informs us that of 250 interviewed street involved youth: 76% of the youth have experienced criminal victimization in the last year, yet only 20% reported the crime to the police. Of all the youth the SYLS program interacts with, the resounding reason for not reporting is that they do not trust the police; feeling that the police would a) not believe them, or b) not protect them.

A review of the statistics by the General Auditor will do little to address these deeply rooted concerns around trusting relations between our youth and our officers tasked with protecting them. The recommendations in TPAC's brief will take steps in the right direction. Providing persons stopped with an information sheet on their rights and a carbon copy of the card note made by the officer will assist persons stopped to understand the reasons for their stop and the procedural rights they are entitled to.

The Board making statements about intolerance to discrimination will set the stage for the deeper work of rooting out discrimination and serving Toronto's youth in a humane manner, respecting human rights from the school room to the basketball court in the neighbourhood of Weston Mount Dennis. You must take action on this crucial matter of public safety. Please feel free to contact me for further discussions.

Regards,

Johanna Macdonald
Counsel, Justice for Children and Youth